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SUBJECT: President Tandja Appoints New Cabinet Members

Ref: Niamey 00701

11. (U) On October 10, President Tandja appointed Kassoum Mamane Moutar to serve as Minister of Communication and Government Spokesperson. He also appointed Salah Ben Mamouda Ali to serve as Minister of Religious Affairs and Humanitarian Action. The two appointees replace Mohamed Ben Omar and Issaka Labo, both of whom resigned September 23 to become eligible to run in the legislative elections slated for October 20 (reftel).

12. (U) The appointment of Kassoum, 31, has caused uproar among opposition members. According to local media accounts, critics argue that Kassoum has no experience in the public arena and lacks the needed education level to carry out such a high-level function. (Note: Kassoum does not hold a college-level degree. End note.) Before his appointment as Minister of Communication, Kassoum was a youth leader, and took part in several marches in support of President Tandja's bid to change the constitution to extend his term in office. Mamouda, however, is a relatively unknown public figure, and thus has eluded such criticism, at least for the time being.

WHITAKER